

Utah **Outsources Maintenance** to Get More Accurate Data

Incomplete and inaccurate vehicle maintenance data prompted the state of Utah to outsource part of its fleet on a pilot program. A one-year evaluation was successful and the outsourced maintenance program was adopted.

By Gene Allen

No matter the size or physical makeup of any fleet, current and realistic data are of the utmost importance. Any budget request, vehicle replacement planning, and even the overall existence of a department and its personnel, can hinge on accurate and complete information.

Some organizations are lucky enough to be computerized and have more data than most would ever use, while others are still trying to really discern exactly what is "enough data" for them to efficiently and cost-effectively operate. This was the problem that faced the state of Utah and its fleet operations division. The state's managed fleet currently consists of approximately 1,934 cars, 654 vans, 275 SUVs, 618 trucks, three tractors, one trailer, and 30 miscellaneous vehicles.

According to Division Deputy Director Margaret Chambers, "As is true with most programs and departments, problems usually come to the surface when they start costing money." Such was the case with the state of Utah's in-house vehicle fleet maintenance system. Inaccurate, untimely and incomplete data reporting from various state agencies were becoming a drain not only on the



Peter Musser, a state of Utah employee, is driving one of the vehicles in the pilot maintenance outsourcing program. Judging from the smile on his face, Musser is happy driving a state of Utah clean air vehicle.

departmental budget but affecting time and resources as well. It was decided a new approach was in order, to establish standard operating procedures.

Chambers was the driving force behind the search for the solution of vehicle maintenance administration and tracking. One solution she felt might cure some of the persistent problems was to require state agencies to follow procedures set by an outside vendor. "This should lessen the workload for division employees, currently tasked with maintaining the state's vehicle database and at the same time possibly improve customer service, while concentrating on improving other areas within the division. There was also hope

that more realistic data reporting might help in administering the state's fuel programs," Chambers said.

Pilot Program Initiated

Chambers initiated a pilot program among the state's 3,511 managed vehicles. It was decided to choose a cross section of vehicles to participate, based upon a certain vehicle's amount of use and its overall wear and tear. Three state agencies were chosen to participate in the pilot program: Public Safety, Commerce, and the Central Motor Pool.

Repeated surveys during the pilot program were planned to help with the evaluation process. The breakdown of vehicles chosen to participate in the

program was: 548 cars, 66 vans, 27 SUVs, and 49 trucks. There were two pilot programs in place, running over a one-year period. Automotive Resources International (ARI) was selected as the fleet management company to handle the pilot program.

"The test program was a success and the pilot fleet went on line starting March 1, 2001. It will take about six months to bring the remaining pilot fleet vehicles on board, one division at a time. Other agencies with independent shops may also go on the program at a later date," said Chambers.

Chambers added, "There are currently three state agencies that continue to keep and operate a vehicle maintenance staff. Those are the Department of Transportation, the State Hospital, and the Department of Corrections."

Day-to-Day Operations

The program put in place by ARI is

basic but functional. Vehicle operators are provided with coupon books to cover preventive maintenance and possible minor repairs. ARI is authorized to approve any repairs up to \$500. Expenses expected to exceed that \$500 cap require prior approval through the Division of Fleet Operations.

ARI also provides statewide emergency roadside breakdown support. This service is provided to all the state's fleet vehicles, not just those on the pilot program. This emergency roadside service became a part of the total evaluation package within the pilot program.

Billing and Reports

The program under review was billed on a monthly basis, with reports provided as backup for payment. These reports provide

Emergency road service is provided to all of the state's fleet vehicles.

much-needed statistical data that is entered into the state's fleet tracking database, where internal reports can be generated as required. Timely and consistent billing and backup enables the state of Utah to pay its billing in approximately 10 days of receipt of the invoice.

Fueling Programs

Utah's state vehicle fleet's fuel needs are overseen by the State Fuel Network. "The network issues credit cards, like fueling cards, which can be used to

purchase fuel, and for some minor preventive maintenance items or service as needed, up to a \$200 limit," said Chambers. GasCard is the commercial entity chosen by the state to handle fuel purchases.

Utah has alternative-fuel

vehicles in its fleet: 19 dedicated compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles, 423 bi-fuel, and one methanol-fueled unit. There are 34 other alternative-fuel vehicles of various descriptions.

A Small But Effective Fleet Operations Department

Utah's Division of Fleet Operations is comprised of:

- Steve Saltzgeber — division director with more than six years on the job.
- Margaret Chambers — deputy director for two years.
- A staff of 52 people including part-time and temporary personnel.

"To date, no employees have been let go, any extra personnel being assigned to other open positions within the department," said Chambers.

"Any savings shown to date have mainly been in the manpower area, in that no additional people have had to be hired to accommodate a larger fleet with a much more comprehensive maintenance reporting system," Chambers added. AF

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